

January 31, 2007

Lee E. Harley-Fitts, Director  
Allendale County DSS  
(803) 584-8112

Response to the questions from the Education Oversight Committee:

1. What are the challenges faced by half of South Carolina's public schools, which enroll a student body in which at least 70 percent of student live in poverty?

In my opinion, the challenges are as follows (not necessarily in the order listed):

- Low morale
- No discipline at home or at school
- No positive male figure in the home
- A mentality that the "system" (DSS, Medicaid, etc...) owes them something

All of these things listed above make it hard for teachers to effectively perform their jobs. We have teachers who are trying to teach students that they are afraid of. Therefore, when the "trouble-makers" act out and disturb the class, the children who really want to learn, can't learn because of these students. Other students join in with the disruption to be accepted and to keep from being bullied.

2. How can we elevate the performance of high-achieving students?

We must take our school system back. There must be tougher discipline rules. Teachers need to know that when they send a student to the office that the student is going to be dealt with. On the other hand, teachers should ensure that they are not sending students to the office for "simple" things that they can handle themselves.

3. How do we support students and schools while dealing with the unprecedented economic and demographic changes South Carolina is already facing?

Although the State of South Carolina is currently undergoing major changes in regards to Economics and Demographics, we still must keep our focus. Young minds cannot be sacrificed while dealing with these issues. I am a firm believer that we can take a little and do wonders, if it is in the hands of the "right" person. We need leaders who care enough to get in the trenches and help. It doesn't take money to volunteer and read to a Kindergarten class. We do not want to give of our time and energy to pass what we know is essential on to our children. Encouragement doesn't cost anything monetary. Today, 1/26/07, I visited an awards program at Fairfax Elementary. It would have been great to see some School Board members, Council members, and even the Superintendent. They may not be your biological children, but just to have the leaders visible at things that may not spark a press release really says a lot.

4. What are the expectations for South Carolina schools?

I expect for the school systems in South Carolina to come up to par. I love my home but have considered relocating due to the poor school system. I want my children to have a good education so that they will be equipped to face the challenges in life. I want to be proud of our school system. Also, if the school system is improved, it will attract more business and industry. This will benefit the entire community.

5. How can we as individuals, organizations, and communities support improved achievement for all students?

We can support our children; love them but also let them know that misbehaving and being disrespectful (at home/school) is not acceptable; encourage them to do their very best (not settle for mediocrity); spend time with them (parents doing homework/reading); listen to them; talk to them – not at them. We must remember that our children are people too. We are responsible for molding and shaping their lives so that they can be the best that they can be. It is up to us to fashion productive citizens. One day, they will be the leaders of our community. Our actions can determine whether they are the next drug addict, thug on the corner or the next President of the United States.

Another issue in Allendale County that is a major factor is the issue to uneducated parents. We have parents that do not value education, thus, that same mentality is passed down to their children.